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Perceptions and Practices of Rural Women on Cultivation and Consumption of Vegetables and Fruits: An Intervention for Food-Related Health Problems in Amhara Region, Ethiopia

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Abstract

A diet that is deficient in nutrients can lead to health problems. Rural women and children are the most vulnerable social groups in terms of food security and balanced diets. Many studies in Ethiopia are witnesses that women and children are mostly affected by malnutrition, undernutrition, non-communicable diseases and other food related health problems. Also certain cultural eating practices and knowledge deficits can lead to food related health problems.

The aim of this study is therefore to understand the rural women's attitudes in cultivating vegetables and fruits for their own consumption, as one approach to secure healthy diets. A survey with 320 purposely-selected women in eight rural *Kebeles* (Amhara region) was done and data analysed with descriptive statistics. The findings of this study indicate that there is neither any eating habit nor little trend of cultivation of vegetables and fruits; and there is no or little awareness about the significance of vegetable and fruits for a healthy diet. Moreover, women perceived that fruits and vegetables are only for unhealthy/ill and weak individuals, which is a widespread conviction in their communities and also women accept such kind of cultural belief.

Furthermore vegetables and fruits are understood as luxury foods which are not very important to their health. Economic and educational status of women and availability of fruits and vegetables also determine their perceptions and habits of consumption of vegetables and fruits. In cases, women produce vegetables and fruits, they mostly sell to secure their income. Hence appropriate food practice programs such as providing intensive training for rural women on how to cultivate vegetables and fruits as well as habituating diverse feeding practices, including vegetables and fruits, and awareness raising about the relevance of vegetables and fruits for their health, are highly recommended.

Keywords: Balanced diet, diverse foods, perception and practice, unhealthy food, vegetables and fruits